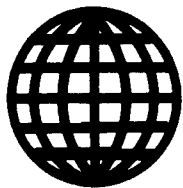


19 April 1993



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Awami League Seen Engaging in Destructive Politics

93AS0676J Dhaka FRIDAY in English 4 Mar 93 p 27

[Article by Mohammad Kamal: "BNP (Bangladesh Nationalist Party) AL (Awami League) Blame Each Other"; quotation marks as published]

[Text] Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia for the last few weeks has been campaigning against the destructive politics of an opposition political party in one hand and giving speeches to motivate the people to cooperate with her administration for achieving economic democracy on the other. Sensing the disastrous impact of the hartal, strike, siege and blockade on the national economy, the Prime Minister has been continuing campaign to mobilise the people's support against such evil actions. Last week in her public appearances in different parts of the country, Begum Zia cautioned the people against the vicious impact of agitational programmes urging the pro-democracy people to unitedly resist the hartal, strike, siege and destruction. 'Hartal cannot yield development... it reverts the wheel of national progress and destroys the nation', the Prime Minister said. Though, she did not mention the name of the political party behind the disturbances, but it was clear from her deliberations that Awami League [AL] has been creating obstacles in every step in the current development programmes through hartal, siege and blockade. Begum Zia questioned the justifiability of some recent hartal calls by Awami League and commented this party goes for hartal, siege, damage of vehicles and destruction of public properties when it loses in election. The Prime Minister was indicating to the actions programmes including hartals, destruction of public properties and damage of vehicles by the Awami League activists after the announcement of the results of Mirpur by-election. The BNP [Bangladesh Nationalist Party] leaders expressed their dissatisfaction over the Awami League's reluctance to accept the verdict of the people even after the recounting of ballots and official announcement by the Election Commission, which has already earned reputation as a neutral body in conducting election. Awami League leaders' observations that no future elections could be held free and fair also amounted to not accepting Election Commission as an independent body. Such attitudes undoubtedly cannot help grow democratic institutions.

The Prime Minister, her Cabinet colleagues and the BNP leaders have intensified their anti-destruction campaign in the wake of the frequent agitational action programmes of Awami League and its allies. According to some ruling party leaders, the Awami League is seeing every action of the government in a negative way instead of doing constructive criticism.

Awami League leaders particularly Sheikh Hasina have been continuing their anti-government propaganda describing the BNP government as a government of promise-breakers and government of betrayers. She also

went on saying that the BNP government is ruling the people with the same outlook as of the Pakistani regime. The way BNP is governing the nation gives the impression that the lovers of Pakistan are ruling the people. Sheikh Hasina, who usually goes for defaming the ruling BNP with harsh statements, this time has tried to brand BNP as the lovers of Pakistan. However, Sheikh Hasina did not substantiate her statement.

Recent action programmes and the statements of Awami League leaders appeared they want to go for all-out movement against the BNP government instead of helping consolidate the democratic process through constructive criticism of the government actions and its failures in running the co-administration. Sources said, though some front ranking leaders of Awami League are in favour of giving BNP more time and seeing the hard earned democratic process placed in firm footing. Sheikh Hasina is unwilling to give the BNP much time for the sake of consolidating democracy. She thinks her party activists are being repressed in different parts of the country and the BNP has no right to stay in power. But Hasina has not yet been able to put forward any acceptable and convincing reasons for which the BNP government should not run the country.

The Prime Minister, in her speeches, explained the reasons for which the opposition has resorted to anti-government action programmes. She obliquely said, the Awami League has resorted to anti-development activities as it has no issues, programmes and does not want to see the uplift of the nation.

In her motivational speeches, the Prime Minister said that the only issue before the nation now is the poverty alleviation and added that the people who had fought for their mother tongue and political independence would also be able to remove poverty with their hard work and labour.

Growth of Fundamentalism in Subcontinent Viewed

93AS0676I Dhaka FRIDAY in English
4 Mar 93 pp 9-10

[Article by Zohurul Islam: "Fundamentalism-Secularism in Subcontinent"]

[Text] The emergence of fundamentalism in India has taken a serious turn following wanton destruction of the historical Babri Masjid. The vandalism is the expression of a state of mind which cannot be characterised in any way as sane or normal.

The frenzied demolition of Babri Masjid and its aftermath is certainly one of the worst things to have happened to India in recent years which sparked off communal violence resulting in the death of several thousand people. The responsibility for this most blatant attack on mosque rests with the entire Indian political system and certainly the Government of India must bear lion's share of the blame for the event. Despite communal tensions

and periodical riots the belief that secularism remains a basic policy of the state was hopeful factor in an otherwise bleak picture. Today this confidence stands shattered.

The Babri Masjid incident can be viewed in different ways. One can look at it as an assault on the susceptibilities of the minority Muslim community of India. It can also be seen as an expression of fanaticism fueled by political motives. However, this was an attempt to change the character of the state which was established under the Indian constitution. It is clearly aimed at the destruction of secularism as a state policy which is enshrined in the constitution.

India is constitutionally a secular country where communal politics is legally banned. Despite that communal forces are using the plank of secularism to take their politics ahead which only fostered fundamentalist forces. But one should not forget that the division of this subcontinent into the two states took place on the basis of two-nation theory at the cost of lakhs of people who were killed by communal forces.

A serious blow has been dealt to the ideal of Indian secularism. The rise of Indian Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has been quite spectacular and has been a disquieting feature of Indian politics. Pakistan is run on the two-nation theory meaning fostering of fundamentalist politics. Curiously enough, the alliance of the communal parties in Pakistan, ostensibly to resist the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the emergence of Jamaat-e-Islami in Bangladesh, have been parallel developments in the two neighbouring countries. Fundamentalist forces have made political gains in certain other countries of the Middle East. BJP has emerged as the second largest political party after India's latest elections.

Jamaat-e-Islami, failing to achieve as much, has thought it wise to lend its support to the ruling party in Bangladesh, hoping to enjoy the protection of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). Whatever protection it has been receiving it sorely needs at the present moment with Golam Azam issues still hanging fire.

Communal tension in India, as and when it occurs, will provide matter for Jamaat in Bangladesh and its allies to decry in public and to welcome without acknowledgement since it furthers its aims at home. This is nothing short of making a political capital out of communalism. The rise of fundamentalism in India was due to lack of strong policy of the Indian Government and also due to rise of fundamentalism in Pakistan and Bangladesh which cast its ominous sign on sub-continental politics.

Pakistan, since its birth in 1947, has been pursuing communal politics by using religion by the politicians who are mostly armed forces or their agents. They have always used religion as apart of subtle propaganda to cheat the poor people to exploit them in the name of religion. In the name of religion, Pakistan unleashed genocide on the people of Bangladesh.

Despite such development, fundamentalist politics in Pakistan could not make headway due to rising political consciousness. In Pakistan, Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif's Government uses religious politics whereas his opponent, former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto believes in secular ideology though she does not proceed for fear of Pakistani environment. Nawaz Sharif has, out of disgust, expelled the fundamentalists from the alliance and is to some extent resting his arch opponent Benazir Bhutto as a counterbalancing force against fundamentalism.

In India, the ruling Congress Party, along with leftist parties and Janata Dal of former Prime Minister V.P. Singh are countering BJP politics as counterbalancing force. The ruling Congress has banned the Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangha (RSS), which controls the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Shiv Sena, Bajarang Dal. These are all fundamentalist outfits. The Indian Government has taken this measure to counter the fundamentalist forces. Some Muslim organisations in India were also banned for fundamentalist politics.

The banning of religious bodies is a futile exercise. This has been done before with no concrete results. A secular name of a party does not guarantee its secular credentials. And what about the people in different parties who hide their fundamentalism behind secular cliches?

What the Congress, the BJP and other political parties should realise is that they have been pandering to religious sentiments of the people for long. They have been wanting to build their vote banks. But this game has gone for too long with drastic results.

It is the time for the sub-continent politicians to take positive steps against the threat of fundamentalist forces being promoted to serve the purpose of the vested groups in politics.

Use of Religion in Politics Condemned

93AS0676H Dhaka FRIDAY in English
4 Mar 93 pp 7-9

[Article by Ahmad Shamim: "Politics Counterbalancing"]

[Text] Use of religion in politics is not a new phenomenon in Bangladesh. Since the partition of British India, people in this part of erstwhile Pakistan witnessed how religion was abused as political weapon by the rulers to misguide innocent people and suppress their legitimate rights. Islam, the religion of the majority in Bangladesh (former East Pakistan), was not only used by the party in power but some religion-based parties. As a result, communal harmony was seen disturbed on several occasions. Until the 1971 War of Liberation, religion played a dominant role in politics in both the wings of former Pakistan. Fundamentalists and most of the Islamic groups, including Muslim League and Jamaat-e-Islami, sided with the Pakistani regime and vehemently opposed

the country's liberation war. With the emergence of independent Bangladesh in 1971, the religion-based political parties met with their obvious demise as the post-independent government of Awami League banned political activities of all these fundamentalist parties, including Jamaat and Muslim League. Besides, the first Constitution of Bangladesh incorporated secularism as one of the four state principles of Bangladesh.

With the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the fall of his government in 1975, the political scenario saw a radical change in Bangladesh. The religion-based parties like Muslim League and Jamaat were allowed to resume their political activities. The 5th Amendment of the Constitution dropped secularism from the Constitution during the rule of late President Ziaur Rahman. Secularism was replaced by "The principles of absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah." The amendment explained that absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah shall be the basis of all actions.

Another milestone in encouraging religion in politics and patronising the fundamentalist elements are recorded when deposed President Hussain Mohammad Ershad made Islam the State religion through 8th Amendment to the Constitution amidst protests by the political parties which preach secularism—Awami League and the left-leaning parties and groups. After the 5th and the 8th Constitutional Amendments, the politics of fundamentalism started taking root but could not come to the limelight. During the anti-Ershad movement, the Islamic political groups, particularly Jamaat, started reorganising itself keeping pace with the two major parties—Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Awami League. In the last parliamentary elections, held under the caretaker government of Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed, Jamaat bagged 18 seats of MPs [Member of Parliament] and became a factor in the process of forming a new government as no political parties, neither BNP nor the Awami League, got the required majority to form the government.

Importance of Jamaat was felt as the party officially extended support to Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia in constituting her government. In exchange, Jamaat got two women MPs from 30 reserved seats for women in parliament. And in the country's political process, the Jamaat-e-Islami and its student wing, Islami Chhatra Shibir, seemed to become a vital factor.

Awami League, its allies and pro-left political and cultural organisations had time and again blamed Prime Minister Begum Zia and her government for giving safe shelter to fundamentalist Jamaat against the pro-liberation camp. As a trusted political friend, Jamaat was also seen siding with the ruling party on different national issues in and outside parliament.

Political analysts say that Jamaat extended support to the ruling BNP, overtly and covertly, not because of keeping BNP in power but for the advancement of its own politics. Some feel that Jamaat being an organised

cadre-based party has the organisational strength to face any challenge from its political adversaries.

In recent times, the activists of Jamaat and the student wing demonstrated their strength in scattered clashes in different educational institutions, including Chittagong and Rajshahi Universities, with parties in the pro-liberation camp.

After the bloody clashes between Islami Chhatra Shibir and pro-liberation student organisations in Rajshahi University on 6 February leaving five students dead and more than 500 injured, Awami League President Sheikh Hasina visited Rajshahi on 12 February. During the visit, Hasina demanded an immediate ban on politics of Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Chhatra Shibir involved in what she called political killing and conspiracy against democracy and independence of the country.

Talking to local newsmen in Rajshahi on 13 February, the opposition leader said, if returned to power with two-thirds majority, her party will amend the Constitution to ban politics of Jamaat Shibir.

The political parties subscribing to the concept of secularism seems to be concerned at the growing strength of the Islamic fundamentalists groups in national politics. After the demolition of Babri Masjid by Hindu fundamentalists in India on 6 December last year, the outbreak of communal violence in different parts of the country caused more concern among the pro-liberation secular forces.

Many observers feel that the concept of secularism seemed to have failed to work. India which was considered the Champion of secularism also failed to uphold its spirit after the razing of the mosque in Ayodhya. Some observers fear the revival of politics of communalism and fundamentalism after the fall of despotism in South-Asian region.

The progressive and democratic forces in the countries in South-Asia are now contemplating to initiate a joint move to check the growing trend of fundamentalist politics. Slogans are being raised in the countries of the region to enact law banning political groups based on religion to maintain amity among the people of different faiths and ensure unhindered journey of democracy.

FRIDAY Correspondent talked to some political leaders belonging to both the camps to know their views on this burning issue. The Five-Party Alliance leader Hasanul Huq Inu said that communal and fundamentalist forces are getting united in view of the failure of the elected governments in the countries of the sub-continent. He thought that one of the reasons of the revival of communalism is perhaps the rule of autocracy instead of democracy in the West. Explaining the last 20 years of politics in Bangladesh, Inu who once advocated scientific socialism said, fundamentalist and communal elements walked hand in hand. He said although the autocracy faced a downfall, democracy is yet to function

properly. This has resulted in the flourishing of communalism. Describing the present BNP government a mini dictator and quasi autocracy, Inu said that the BNP got support from communal forces to consolidate its power but the irony of fate is that this fundamentalist force will make counter attack on the ruling party. Inu suggested immediate unity of secular and democratic forces to initiate a political move to check and bury the communal elements.

Ganatantri Party leader Suranjit Sen Gupta, MP, said that to check the revival of communal politics in the region, the member countries of the SAARC [South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation] will have to take up this issue as the number one agenda for discussion and take a consensus resolution. Pointing out to the political trend in last two decades in the sub-Continent, Sen Gupta said, move is on to turn the countries in the region as theological states—that is Pakistan as an Islamic Republic State for the Muslims, Bangladesh whose state religion was made Islam is for muslims, Sri Lanka for Sinhalese, Nepal for Hindus, India for Hindus and Bhutan for the Buddhists. But this trend should not be subscribed as communalism and democracy cannot survive side by side. "We believe in politics of consensus and unity instead of division and confrontation," Sengupta said, adding that democracy loving patriotic parties and governments should take a concerted move to ensure the legitimate rights of the minority groups in the countries in the region.

Talking to FRIDAY, Jamaat-e-Islami leader Maulana Matiur Rahman Nizami said that those who are talking about fundamentalism perhaps do not understand the actual connotation of the word fundamentalism. Islam has nothing to do with the fundamentalism some quarters are talking about. Islam is the name of a dynamic ideology which will exist as the most modern code of human life.

Asked if practice of religion in politics would create impasse to the functioning of democracy, Nizami outright rejected the idea and said that presentation of Islam all over the world "is very rational, intellectual and scientific." He asserted that there is no scope to discover the so-called fundamentalism or communalism in Islam.

In reply to a question on secularism, the Jamaat Secretary General said, there is no existence of secularism as an ism. Those who are preaching secularism in our country are suffering from narrow mindedness. To a question, he said, that in an important European country like Germany, there are two major political parties—Christian Democratic Party and Christian Democratic Union—which are based on religion. He said that India cannot be called a secular state. It's a country controlled by caste Hindus. In Britain, the king is considered as the defender of the Protestant faith. There is no neutral behaviour in so-called secularism, he observed.

Asked if Islam allows secularism, Nizami said, some parties are trying to substantiate this point by quoting

two Ayats (verses) of Holy Quran. This is an attempt at misinterpreting the Quran. He said if any individual or party finds secularism in Holy Quran, let them accept it in its entirety.

When his attention was drawn to widespread allegation of clandestine relation between Jamaat-e-Islami and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Nizami said, it is baseless. He said, as Islam has no relation with the Hindu religion, an Islamic Party like Jamaat cannot have any link with a Hindu religious party.

On revival of religion-based politics, Nizami said, this happens in accordance with the normal evolution of history when "man-made" ism fails to solve the problems faced by mankind. He said, history is now on its turning point and the victory of Islam is a must.

Necessity Proclaimed for 'Political Pluralism'

93AS0676G Dhaka FRIDAY in English
4 Mar 93 pp 6-7

[Article by Mostafa Nur Mohammad: "Political Pluralism Should Not Be undermined"; quotation marks as published]

[Text] The reunification of splinter factions of Bangladesh Muslim League and the floating of a new political alliance under the leadership of former President Khandakar Mushtaq Ahmed were important developments of the political arena recently.

Political pundits view these turns in politics as a planned response to the assaults that pro-Islamic parties have been subjected to for the last one and a half years.

The anti-Golam Azam agitations during the period first turned into anti-Jamaat, Shibir movement. The forces which launched these agitations have now gone one step further and are demanding imposition of ban on religion-based political parties.

Clearly such a development in politics would in the long run hurt not only Jamaat, but also other parties and groups which are ready to guard the element of religion in politics.

The new political alliance and the reunited Muslim League that have been formed cannot be dismissed as 'platforms of rightists' as they used to be categorised in the past, because the two major actors in the political scene—Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Bangladesh Awami League—have changed their economic policies in favour of market-oriented development. Other forces like Jatiya Party and Jamaat are known rightist forces.

So, if somebody has to brand the new groupings with a bad name, the name should be selected with care. No doubt, they are pro-Islamic groupings. But they have different conglomeration of forces. The Muslim League is known to be a platform of liberal democrats. The Nationalist Democratic Alliance launched under the leadership of Khandakar Mushtaq Ahmed is different.

Col (Retd) Abdur Rashid of Freedom Party has been made the Executive Chairman while Anwar Zahid of Bangladesh National Democratic Party has been made its Secretary General. ASM Sulaiman of Krishak Sramik Party is also one of the front line leaders of the new alliance.

The Nationalist Democratic Alliance comprise those leaders who were associated with or were supporters of the change of power in August 1975, that had ended the short-lived one-party rule of BKSAL (Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League).

The manifesto of the new alliance stands for consolidation of national independence and sovereignty, protection of the religious beliefs, history, culture of the people and their distinct national identity. It said a deep conspiracy was being hatched to undo the feeling of distinct national identity that had fostered the spirit of independence on the basis of 1500 years of glorious history and tradition.

It said the craving of power of certain forces and the continued conspiracy of others opposed to national solidarity had pushed the nation towards instability and uncertainty.

On the change of August 1975 it was more the politics of Bangladesh was clearly divided into two streams based on that change. One stream believed in development of the economy on the basis of Bangladesh nationalism, free economy through a democratic process. It sought to establish national unity to face expansionist designs and was a follower of the basic tenets of Islam. The other stream was opposed to all these things. The second stream, according to the alliance, was creating issues out of nothing just to create disunity and change the post 1975 trend in politics. It accused two forces, one of which was 'rejected by the people' and the other was the present government which 'has betrayed the people's mandate'.

Anwar Zahid, Secretary General, of the new alliance, it may be recalled, led programmes of the 'Bharatiya Dalal Protirodh Committee' and 'Juba Command' which sprang up to counter the activities of the 'Ekatturer Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Committee'.

The politics of Bangladesh in the last one and a half years practically revolved around the Golam Azam issue. Awami League and its allies lent support to the 'Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Committee' which organised demonstrations all over Bangladesh. The ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) which at the beginning preferred to remain silent ultimately took to the street.

Golam Azam's case is now under trial at the Supreme Court of Bangladesh. But the organisers of the agitations have, by their actions, proved that their objective was well beyond such a trial. They are after banning of the politics of Jamaat and Shibir.

Awami League and its allies are blaming the ruling BNP for rehabilitating Jamaat in politics by relating a provision made in the 1972 Constitution against organisation of political parties based on religion. They are also demanding restoration of that provision. Viewed against this backdrop the emergence of the new political alliance and the reunification of splinter factions of Bangladesh Muslim League are responses to the politics of the past one and a half years.

After the restoration of democracy in 1991, the people believed that all problems facing the country could be solved through the processes of democracy. Unfortunate developments that have taken place since then have shattered this belief at least to some extent. Perhaps, it is time for our leaders to realise once again that no problem can be solved permanently through the use of force. One political party should face another political party politically. If one prefers the use of force the other may also go for the same option. And the use of force could only undermine the democratic process established after so many years of enormous sacrifice made by the people. Political pluralism, the essence of democracy, should not be undermined for short term gains of any quarters.

Democratic, Competent Government Seen Still a Dream

93AS0676F Dhaka THE MORNING SUN in English
28 Feb 93 p 4

[Article by Hemayetuddin Ahmed: "Shattered Dreams in Two Years After Elections"]

[Text] Politics in this part of the world has been a tragic saga of shattered dreams, broken promises and frustrated hopes. Politicians' vision has often been blurred, their perception myopic and ephemeral and their conviction and loyalty shifting. It is the lack of vision of the politicians and their constant antipathy towards one another that had made it possible for the British Raj to partition the subcontinent in such a way as would give us a "moth-eaten" Pakistan. The partition left a vast number of Muslims at the mercy of communal elements in India who are still dearly paying for it. It is their failure for which military adventurists ruled united Pakistan for much its existence till they had forcibly driven away its eastern part to seek independence.

It is again the politicians who after liberation made a mess of the unbounded opportunity that offered itself for building a strong democratic and progressive country. It is they who had thrown the democracy loving people of the country under a system that smacked of an extreme form of dictatorship. It is again the politicians who had acquiesced with the young turks of the army in brutally killing the founder of the country with most of his family members. When the civilian government of Justice Sattar was dislodged by General Ershad, no politician raised a finger though they knew it was coming. On the other hand, many of them had gathered around him enabling him to run the country for nine years all by

himself. Finally a united movement of the people forced him to step down and hand over power to an interim government.

The non-political and non-partisan interim government performed its task commendably. It accomplished the peaceful transition to democracy by holding a free and fair elections and by replacing the presidential type of government with a parliamentary one in a remarkably short period. The elections that took place two years ago placed Khaleda Zia in power with a comfortable majority. Within another six months, the constitution was amended, a new titular head of the state elected, and the Prime Minister assumed the powers of the chief executive.

Since then, nearly a year and a half has passed. But is there any change in the attitude of the politicians? Our politicians, whether in power or outside, seem to be engaged in endemic and embittered squabbles among themselves keeping their respective party and personal interest on top and forgetting all about the country which offers them a playground for their games. The most tragic part of it is that Khaleda Zia, who is from a different breed of politicians, having been drawn to the realm of politics with a mission and not for a living, seems to have started belying the hopes of the people that had been pinned on her. She led a relentless struggle for long nine years and did not give in in spite of all kinds of threats and intimidation. She had a popularity which she built herself.

Yet, if one looks at her performance in politics, economy and administration over the last two years, it is hardly encouraging. Politically, she has not been able to disarm her adversaries, mainly the Awami League [AL] and the Jatiya Party [JP]. There has been a great deal of discontent in the AL on the question of leadership, but she had not been able to take any advantage from it. The AL's strength remains undiminished as seen in the bye elections. It can paralyse life in the city, and if necessary, throughout the country by giving a call for a hartal. The JP, likewise, remains in a powerful position where they were two years ago despite the brawl over the position of its secretary general. On the other hand, her party's relations with the Jamaat and other pro-religious and nationalist forces is estranged. The go slow stance on the trial of Golem Azam and others as well as the AL demand for the repeal of the indemnity provision has not been able to defuse the agitation by the Nirmul body and the AL.

Khaleda Zia's macro-economic reforms are yet to show results. Though a bumper crop this year has kept the price of rice stable, the farmers do not have enough for their produce. New industries are not coming up mainly for the fragile law and order situation, soaring wages, indisciplined labour and lack of capital. The Finance Minister's innovations, including lowered interest rate and his imploring the bank managers to advance funds to entrepreneurs have proved to be ineffective. Sick

industries' problems remain unresolved. The unemployment situation is worsening. Privatisation moves are stalled. Donor agencies are reportedly unhappy. Clearly the economy is in the doldrums, and there is no ray of hope.

The greatest sore point has, however, been the unabated surge of crime, violence and disorder in which the law and order agencies have miserably failed. There has been, occasionally, undue influencing of the administrative machinery by political elements. The bureaucracy as a whole remains either non-cooperative or indifferent or overenthusiastic leading to delay in implementing decisions or muddling up matters. This has been in evidence not only in internal administration but also in dealing with matters with the neighbours.

If Khaleda Zia's government has not totally failed, it has lagged behind to live up to people's expectation. Perhaps the euphoria was too much, but they could hardly be blamed. There was still time to make up for lost time. Her government can still enhance its image by honest efforts. Things might have gone wrong sometimes but her government's track record in many ways may not appear that bad considering the misdeeds of the past and impediments created by her rivals. She has been trying to meet the political challenges of her adversaries politically, and has made our parliament work despite serious threats from the opposition. Her credential as a champion of democracy has remained untarnished. Her financial reforms have been acclaimed. What is needed now is tightening of the administration and serious efforts to give the country a good government.

There can be no substitute for a good government. Freedom, democracy, sovereign parliament and independent judiciary all become redundant if citizens do not feel secure with their life and property and cannot peacefully pursue their normal vocations. No amount of politicking, no mammoth meetings, no large scale influx of party supporters can assure Khaleda Zia of retaining or coming back to power as can a good government by her do. She must spurn the way the other politicians have trodden in the past and concentrate on running the government effectively and impartially. Let the partisan game be played by other party leaders, but her primary duty is to streamline the administration. With a formidable majority in Parliament, with her personal integrity, and a charismatic personality, she should be capable of doing it once she gives serious attention to all the malaise that is accumulating everyday.

Hindus Said Forming New Political Party

93AS0676E Dhaka THE MORNING SUN
in English 1 Mar 93 pp 1, 12

[Text] Some Hindu leaders have initiated a move to form a political party of their own to project and uphold the community's interest and rights as the citizens of the country and also register their viewpoint in the state politics.

According to sources the new party would be floated sometime later this month or early April. The move is also aimed at facing the communal politics pursued these days by fundamentalist political parties and organisations.

A Convening Committee headed by Justice Devesh Bhattacharya, one of the key figures in the community, has already been formed to prepare the draft constitution of the proposed party. The new party, in all probability, will be headed by Justice Bhattacharya.

A leader of the convening committee told THE MORNING SUN on Sunday that Hindus felt it an imperative to have their own political party to ventilate their grievances especially stemmed from the chain of events following the demolition of the Babri Mosque that affected the Hindus in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh, predominantly a Muslim country has some 1.5 million Hindus who have been living here since 1947 partition. A political party of Hindus will be first of its kind in the country.

Leaders of the proposed Hindu party held a closed door meeting on Friday last during which they reviewed the latest situation with particular reference to the safety and security of the Hindus. Some members at the meeting said the community was feeling unsafe and deprived after the communal violence during the rule of former President Ershad and more so since the recent communal tension as a backlash of the Babri Mosque demolition.

A front ranking leader of the proposed party, who preferred anonymity, said the main purpose in floating their own political organisation was to strengthen the community's position and movement in Bangladesh, counter the communal politics, restore secularism and remove what he said discrimination among communities on religious lines.

The new Hindu political party will also fight to restore the original character of 1972 constitution which had ensured equal rights of all citizens irrespective of caste and creed.

English Language Skills Said Atrophying

93AS0676D Dhaka DHAKA COURIER in English
26 Feb 93 pp 22-23

[Article by Syed Badrul Ahsan: "The Palsied State of English"]

[Text] I am greatly appalled at what I see all around me. Yes, I am of course referring to the state of the world, to conditions that prevail in the country. And there are very often those very profound moments when I wonder about the state of the individual once he breathes no more. There is something about the grave, that little spot of ground containing the bones of a man once thriving and exuberant which jars the nerves. Am I afraid of

death? Far from it. I think there is something very poignant about the act of dying, something which tells us all that the beauty of life comes with the mystery of death. Bill Clinton kneels before the grave of John Kennedy. The symbolism is apt. The paths of glory lead but to the grave. There will be a day for Clinton to die. I pray—and I do it in the manner of an agnostic—that he lives to be as old as Methuselah, or as durable as Richard Nixon. He doesn't have to go to Dallas to close his eyes upon the world, does he?

The idea of death is always a very deep kind of feeling. Those of us who think about it endlessly in the end seem able to come to terms with it, seeing that death is a necessary thing. It will come when it will come. But does the English language have to be the cause of our capitulation before mortality? No, I don't mean to be melodramatic. Nor do I have any desire of pulling what people call a fast one. I have never quite fully understood what that term, fast one, really means. There are people who often come to me and tell me all about fast girls, rather disparagingly. I remember that when I decided to get married a decade ago, a lot of people thought, I was being naive not to know that women who came from Calcutta were of a pretty fast demeanour. What they meant to tell me was that Calcutta women were traditionally thought to be more domineering than their Dhaka sisters. But there it was, this adjectival 'fast' being thrown at me. I went bravely ahead, and became somebody's husband. The rest, as my friends will note, is history. But let me change the subject, fast! Lest the readers begin to fidget, and for obvious reasons.

The English language is today one of our most fundamental problems. And I mean in this country. Of course, there will be the cynics who will ask if that's any revelation. It's not. Everyone knew, after 1972 (when spillover patriotism led to the decision to do away with English) that the Queen's language was doomed. But English didn't die. It would have been a great sort of relief if it did. It lost its health, turned ghastly, and finally went into a comatose condition. That is precisely how it exists today in this country. If you don't believe it, you are welcome. But do make it a point to flip through a few of our English-language newspapers sometimes. One gets the feeling that journalists with working knowledge of English are a rapidly dying species. Imagine this headline, on the front page of a leading English language daily a few days ago, "Shanti Bahini killed in gunfire." Can you believe it? I tell you it's not your imagination running wild. It's the sub-editor's English slipping out of control. Now if the Shanti Bahini is actually dead, that would cheer a lot of people. The Chittagong Hill Tracts would become monotonously peaceful. But, no! What our sub-editor meant to enlighten us with was the death of a Shanti Bahini guerilla in gunfire. Little did he know, when he shaped that headline, that he was giving us all a bit of humour. God knows we need humour, in these days of brave mediocrity, to keep us going.

I am told that Abdus Salam was a powerful journalist in his time. I can believe that. There is something about

people who lived and worked in the fifties and sixties that enthrals us. And it does so because these people, or most of them anyway, were the beneficiaries of a well-rounded education. But Salam, it appears, had on his staff a young man who made it his specialty to use the wrong kind of English in his writings. If the man has any doubt about any word or phrase, why doesn't he look up the dictionary? The question was Salam's and it was put to another journalist. Sir, replied the journalist, that exactly is the problem. He has no doubt about any word or phrase. Perhaps the story is all apocryphal. Perhaps it isn't. But it does prove my point that a good number of people whose business it is to deal in and deal with English in Bangladesh these days are all given to a massive degree of self-confidence. There is an editor who does not seem to believe that "its" does not have to be used as "its" all the time. What makes his whole attitude galling is that he decides to put his erudition on display in a front-page leader. I think I blush a little then.

And then think about the elderly journalist who did the classic thing not many years ago in describing a rural crime in the country. His headline was bewildering—Woman raped by rapacious man. What is a rapacious man? But, no matter! And are women always raped by rapacious men? There is, after all that rapacity, this mind-boggling headline in a recent issue of an English-language daily, "Was Lenin tried to be assassinated?" One must engage in quite a bit of mental mathematics to get through to the meaning, and even then remain deprived of grammatical gratification. How is this for our first brain teaser? Was Lenin put on trial with the specific objective of being assassinated? Or did the sub-editor who put us into a quandary really mean to suggest something that we think we know? I'd rather not answer any of those questions, for if I do, I'll have to answer other questions that I have before me. "The return of the prodigal"—so screamed the headline of a newspaper in Dhaka some years ago when Niaz Murshed came home. The sports reporter who coined the term probably thought he was being a powerhouse. In reality, he was unconsciously humiliating Murshed.

Isn't it time we left our journalists alone? You bet it is. But, before that, you really must be told about this journalist who confuses feet with legs. There is certainly something sexy about legs (think of Brigitte Nielsen or Sharon Stone); but when one tries picturing the legs of a parliamentary opposition, one is really giving new flesh to the idea of the metaphysical conceit. "All on a sudden," so wrote this journalist in a well-known newspaper not very long ago, "the opposition stood on its legs." Two beautiful mistakes here. All ON-and not OF—a sudden. And legs, not feet. Boy, was someone trying to play footsie with the English language?

There used to be a store dealing in electrical goods on a Dhaka street not long ago. The articles were of an exquisite kind, rich in pattern and seductive in appeal. What heightened the quality of it all was the liberality of emotion scrawled on the glass pane looking out on the street. "Impossible is a word. We don't believe it. Look

at our front." Look at our front! Think of the immense possibilities opening up before the prospective buyer. The more fastidious among us would think the Kama Sutra was on sale.

The Lord help us all as we go looking for fig leaves. The English language must preserve its modesty, shouldn't it? Here in Bangladesh?

Well, I must have to say goodbye, for now. "Must have to?" Yes, beautiful superfluity, wouldn't you say? And next time around, we will discuss about things less prosaic. "Discuss about?" Don't ask me! I learnt by way of BTv.

Future of English Press Termed 'Very, Very Bleak'

93AS0676C Dhaka THE DAILY STAR in English
28 Feb 93 p 20

[Article by A.F.M. Jamaluddin: "Problems of English Newspapers in Bangladesh"]

[Text] What I am writing here is a layman's views on the "Problems of English Newspapers in Bangladesh."

To me, the single most important problem is that of "literacy," and there can be no two opinions about it. Whatever literacy figure is dished out to us from time to time by the government functionaries, the true, realistic picture is abysmally dismal. In a country with a population of over eleven crore, the literacy rate hovers between 20-22 percent only. This figure includes people who can somehow scribble their name and address in Bengali only and not read or write anything else—not even in Bengali. Is this the definition of literacy? I wonder!

This literacy problem is compounded further by the very small percentage of people who can read and understand English reasonably well. This results in very low readership of English newspapers in Bangladesh. If this is the general scenario, then how can anyone expect English newspapers to survive in Bangladesh? But the problem doesn't end here.

English has been badgered badly by successive governments of Bangladesh without realising what irreparable damage they (the Govts) were doing to our education system as a whole. Successive govts and their policy makers are, to a large extent, responsible for the very shameful state of English in our country today. Without taking realistic views they played to the gallery and juggled English around accordingly to their whims and convenience. Just after our Liberation, with one stroke of the Executive pen, English was banished from all govt offices and correspondence. Later govts tried to introduce teaching of English at different levels of education: some at primary level and some at the graduation level, but unfortunately no consistency was maintained, leaving the students in limbo and thoroughly poor in the use of English as a second language.

Over the years this has resulted in an acute shortage of well-versed journalists, reporters, sub-editors, columnists and writers for English newspapers. With unhindered proliferation of English newspapers, weeklies and periodicals in recent times, this paucity is being felt much more severely. At present English newspaper employers are left with no alternative and are compelled to hire from this half-educated work force. Let me emphatically mention it here that the blame for this sorry state of affairs should not be put on these ill-equipped youths but on equally half-educated govts, policy-makers, so-called educationists and teachers who are averse to accepting English as an essential tool of modern day progress and learning.

All these above impediments add up to very poor possibilities for the English language newspapers in Bangladesh. To sum up in one simple sentence "its future is very, very bleak" in the near future. Would-be English newspapers owners—BEWARE!

Efforts to Establish Independent Press Viewed

93AS0676B Dhaka THE DAILY STAR in English
28 Feb 93 p 13

[Article by Mahfuz Anam: "The Challenge and the Prospect of the Non-Partisan Media"; quotation marks as published]

[Text] Many people smiled when two years ago, we launched THE DAILY STAR and declared our intention of making it an independent and non-partisan paper. Some thought we were naive, others foolish, and still others, that we were well intentioned but somewhat out of tune with reality. The more we insisted, the more these people appeared convinced about our inability to achieve what we had set out to do. I found the reaction quite infuriating and wondered what was the big deal about being independent and non-partisan. After all isn't being independent the first thing about being a journalist? Isn't being non-partisan the most fundamental ethical requirement of the profession? If so, then why the scepticism and the ridicule?

Two years into our existence, I am far wiser and perhaps more patient with the sceptics. Today I understand why, at the outset, our readers took a while in taking us at our word. We had to get it the hard way, through our daily performance, whatever modest prestige we have been able to earn about our integrity and fairness. Today we enjoy the very unique—but somewhat uncomfortable, (but we are proud of it)—position of being considered pro-Awami League by the BNP [Bangladesh Nationalist Party] diehards, as government's lackey by those who think that all virtue belong to Awami League, and as biased and far from objective by the Jamaat and the Jatiya Party. Enjoying the common denominator of being considered by all the major political parties that we belong to the other side, we have carved out a place for ourselves in the hearts and minds of the discriminating readers. Even the sceptics are beginning to believe that

yes, it is possible to be independent, non-partisan, and yet survive. Better still, survive well.

Based on THE DAILY STAR's experience, what would be some of the problems that an independent and non-partisan paper faces today? It was partly to seek an answer to that question, and to chalk out the possible areas of development for ourselves that we organised the Round-Table, whose text appears elsewhere in this supplement.

In my view, there is yet no clear idea among certain people as to the role of an independent paper. 'Independence' is very often confused with being 'anti-government'. As the 'Fourth Estate', the media definitely belongs to a world which is outside the establishment, and as such, it always plays the role of a watchdog. As the government is the repository of so much power and is responsible for spending the tax payers' money, it is natural that the media will keep a sharp focus on its performance and have the largest number of stories on it—most of which may be critical. But that is by no means the same as to say that media will always be anti-government. Or, on the contrary the media becomes the government's lackey if we write something positive about it.

This, in my opinion, is a reflection of the sharp polarisation and extreme politicisation in our society. For most [of] us, there is the 'we' and the 'they', with nothing in between. Take the present political scene for instance. The ruling BNP sees absolutely nothing good in the major opposition party, the Awami League. It is needless to mention that the feeling is reciprocated with equal enthusiasm from the AL side. Yet, just two years ago they fought hand-in-glove to oust the autocratic Ershad. And that they did so for quite a few years together. If for nothing else, but for fighting a common enemy together, the BNP and the AL should have had some mutual respect for one another. On the contrary, if one is to go by the present political rhetorics of the two parties, there has never been as evil and as vile and despicable a force, as one party would like us to believe about the other. In their enthusiasm of putting down one another, they even end up implying, unwittingly I suppose, that Ershad was better than what BNP is today, or what AL was in the early seventies.

Caught in this politics of extremes, the independent media is always under pressure to tow this or that line. Thus when the STAR wrote unsparingly against the government, the opposition loved us and thought we were independent. But when we trained our sharp focus in the opposite direction, we were suddenly suspected to be buckling under government pressure, or making a secret deal for the DFP [Department of Films and Publications] ads.

This brings me to another point. Given the polarisation in the society, and the partisanship among a section of the people themselves, sometimes less importance is attached to what is being said, compared to speculations

as to why it is being said. Such speculation could well be justified in politics, but not in judging the performance of a non-partisan paper. This point was touched upon by two distinguished participants in the Star Round-Table, and both thought that it was more important to know who was saying it, as compared to what was being said. It is exactly this attitude that I find contrary to the spirit and ethos of an independent media. The readers must give the foremost importance to what is being said. The content will have to be judged on the basis of the points and arguments made in it. To cite an example, when the STAR wrote commentaries against the opposition, some tried to give the impression that either we were trying to gain ground with the government or making up for some previous hurt feelings. The value of what was said and the critical hour in which it was said, were all lost on them. Similarly, when we wrote commentaries hitting hard against irresponsible comments by the government, the immediate interpretation was that we were trying to make up with the opposition. Again the content, the relevance of what was being said, and its timeliness was thrown to the wind, and we were being judged by some totally extraneous measures rather than by what we had put in print. But the good thing from the experience was that most of our readers went along with us, judged us for what we stood for—did not look for extraneous motives—and gave us more support through increased circulation. So though I bring this point up as a problem, the problem is in the process of solving itself and our position as a non-partisan paper is increasingly gaining ground.

The extreme partisanship in the political arena, has had a singular negative affect in the profession of journalism. The latest manifestation of it is the split in the Dhaka Union of Journalists (DUJ). The popular wisdom is that the federation, the BFUJ [Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists] is likely to follow suit. I sincerely hope that it is not the case, and that the trend is reversed. It is known to all that the split has been on political lines. We will not go into the question of who did what, and when, and who is to blame for this eventuality. The fact at the end of the day, is that the community which is supposed to perform the role of the "watchdog," the profession whose comments and observations are to serve as guiding principles for the general public, today stand divided, not on professional issues but on partisan ones.

This I consider to be a serious threat to our profession, especially to the growth of a non-partisan press. How can we expect the public to believe our judgment, to have faith in the facts that we unveil, to trust the conclusions we draw from our investigative reports, if at the very outset, our neutrality is not above question, our integrity is not above suspicion and our motive is not the highest that our professional ethics teach us.

Today not only the professional body is split, each faction is accusing other of fund misappropriation and breaking all the rule of the organisation. If now our readers raise the question as to why they should believe in our integrity when a section of our colleagues find it

suitable to accuse the other of all sorts of corruption. This is not to suggest that we should not bring out the corruption within us. In fact we should do so mercilessly only to keep high the reputation of our profession. The point is, that it should not be made only to satisfy our personal or partisan political aims.

Unless we as journalists can develop the maturity to separate our political views from our professional obligations, we are not likely to build the independent and non-partisan press that we so desperately need to strengthen democracy. This in my opinion is the biggest challenge that we as journalists face today.

However THE DAILY STAR experience has so far been that it is possible to build a credible media if we are determined to do so. Yes, it is hard, yes very few will believe you at the outset, yet if you can hang in there, ultimately readers will veer towards you. This is amply demonstrated by the rising readership that we have. In fact, my own view is that there has been so much of acrimony, so much partisanship and so many one-eyed view of things, that people are thirsty and eager for a more sober and balanced view of things. If we can keep to our independent and non-partisan position, and exist long enough to convince the public about our sincerity and integrity than the future is bound to be ours. Media professionals should take heed of the new and rising public mood and give higher and higher place to their professional ethics and less and less to their personal political views. Otherwise we run the risk of being rejected by the people.

So THE DAILY STAR is on the right path. We will just have to try harder and harder. The future is ours. The future belongs to the independent and non-partisan media.

Government Said Failing to Implement Economic Policy

93AS0676A Dhaka HOLIDAY in English
26 Feb 93 pp 1, 3

[Article by Hossain Khasru: "The Illusion of Macro-Economics"]

[Text] The government has come under strong criticism from the private sector for its failures to translate its promises for market-oriented policies into effective implementation. Last week's meeting of the Export Consultative body or the earlier meeting of the representatives of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI), the country's largest trade promotion organisation, with the Prime Minister reflected amply well the mood of trade and industry operators: a growing disenchantment with the establishment for its inefficient handling of the economic and development issues.

Much of the anger or frustration of the private sector is with the bureaucratic stranglehold or overkill and its

stifling effects on economic activity, poor policy implementation support, lack of inter-ministerial coordination and restive labour front, all making the so-called "market-oriented policy reforms" of the government mere public gimmicks.

Even Nepal, not to speak of Vietnam which is a late starter with reforms but has the advantages of strong commitments of its government, organised labour force and advantages of skilled human resources with a quality education system at work, is showing a better performance in the changed regional and international economic environment. Public and private investments in Nepal are about 18 percent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) which represents the aggregate value of goods and services produced annually in any country. In Bangladesh, investments as the ratio to its GDP stand at about 1.5 percent—public investments plummeted to 5.8 percent of GDP in 1991-92 from 8.6 percent in 1986-87 and private investments remain stagnant at the same old level at 5.6 percent as before.

And again, the efficiency and quality of investments are the lowest in Bangladesh in South Asia. In the public sector investments, the costs have no relevance to returns and that is the case with all public sector expenditures, current or developmental—whether in education, health and family planning, or any other social or infrastructures sectors. In the private sector, growing business sickness, mainly because of poor and inconsistent policy support of the government would show why generation of surpluses or profits in most cases becomes almost impossible.

WD-IMF

While disenchantment in private sector is growing on a wider scale, the mood of the external donor community, particularly the leading multilateral development institutions like the World Bank (WB) or the International Monetary Fund [IMF] which set the basic policy guidelines through their adjustment credit programmes, remains apparently a mixed one: accolade for 'successful' fiscal and monetary stabilisation efforts by the government and criticism for failures to get the things moving faster and quicker in effective ways to facilitate stronger links between "macro-economics" and "micro-level performance."

That is exactly how one would like to assess the situation in the light of the reports, appearing in the print media on the Finance Minister's pre-Consortium meeting consultations with the WB-IMF officials in Washington, the comments made by the chief executive of International Finance Corporation (IFC) or the private sector lending arm of the WB during his visit to Dhaka in early January and also the statement given by the WB President Lewis Preston to the press in Dhaka on the conclusion of his three-day visit to Bangladesh in the latter part of 1992.

And the latest WB draft report prepared for the forthcoming Aid-to-Bangladesh Club in Paris, shows also such a mixed assessment. A positive note has been taken by the WB of the government's recent "macro-economic stabilisation" efforts and the country's successes, in raising rice production by about 50 percent in last twenty years, bringing it nearer to attainment of its long-cherished objective of self-sufficiency in food, and also in bringing about a decline in the population growth rate from 2.6 percent in the 1970s to less than 2.2 percent now. But the bank has also noted the challenges or the priorities that the government still faces for a vibrant economic growth process and sustainable development. And the priorities, where effective government actions are yet to be seen, according to the bank, are: increasing efficient public sector investment, raising external competitiveness of the economy and getting the private sector moving.

Public Sector Losses

The public sector losses in Bangladesh are still very high and stand at 30 percent of annual project aid disbursements, according to the WB draft report. The question then comes: can the economy being it self dependent on massive external aid, absorb such losses which are diverting resources from investment, operation and maintenance and other high priority areas? The overall public sector in Bangladesh is also responsible for 25 percent of gross domestic capital formation. The inefficiencies in this sector, therefore have a direct impact on the level and quality of public investments.

The slow action, if not lack of it, on the part of the government to improve the operational efficiency of the public sector enterprises, reduce their system losses (system loss in Bangladesh) is certainly not unique to Power Development Board alone), privatise them wherever possible, etc., have been highlighted in this context in the draft report of the bank. Perhaps to illustrate its point on system losses in the overall public sector, the bank has stressed the need for urgent reforms of accounting and financial management of Bangladesh Water Development Board where, as it has reported, accounting principles were not applied for 2.1 million tons of wheat under food-for-works during the last 18 years, leading to accumulated discrepancies between annual receipts and the amount actually realised or utilised.

Aid Utilisation

The aid utilisation issues have also figured in the report. At the forthcoming Consortium meeting, such issues, as the available indicators suggest, would prominently figure in the discussions before fresh aid pledges are made for 1993-94.

But, the government still seems to be only casual or at best following a "business-as-usual" approach to the

major challenges that it faces on the economic front. It is yet to realise the urgency for hard actions in the context of what the competing economies in South Asia and other parts of the wider region are doing and how they are progressing. Or, perhaps the rest of the world does not exist for itself and it does not bother to understand

the dynamics of their changes while keeping itself contented, of course in a self-deluded way, by claiming that "the policy changes" in Bangladesh are excellent and even the best in South Asia. But such changes are hardly working at the ground level or at its real implementation stages. That is the crux of the problem.

Tamil, Muslim Intellectuals Urged to Unite

93AS0632C Colombo VIRAKESARI in Tamil
23 Feb 93 p 8

[Article by Virakesari correspondent: "Tamil-Muslim Intellectuals Should Unite and Improve Relations Between the Communities"]

[Text] In order to bring about peace and amity among the Tamil and Muslim communities living in the north-eastern part of the island, an organization consisting of Tamil and Muslim intellectuals should formulate proposals for peace in the region, so says an appeal issued by the South Sri Lanka Muslims.

A.I.M. Sali, former member of the Peruvalai Municipal Council and social worker, proposed the resolution containing the appeal at a convention of the Kaluthurai district Muslim League Youth Front held at Al-Hamasara Central College at Peruvalai. The convention gave its approval to the resolution with a unanimous vote.

The resolution further stated that though a few have participated in violent activities, the majority of the Tamils expect peace. Tamil and Muslim communities want to be united. The Muslims of South Sri Lanka want this kind of peaceful atmosphere to be created. To bring this about, the intellectuals in Tamil and Muslim communities should unite and work together.

Imthiyar Makkar, Minister of State for Housing, A.R.M. Fathiquddin, Chief of Regional Assembly, Masahym Mahamud Pervalai, the Municipal Council's opposition leader, intellectuals, and notables attended the convention.

Minister Thondaman Assures Relief for Tamils

93AS0632B Colombo VIRAKESARI in Tamil
22 Feb 93 p 1

[Text] "The sufferings of the Tamil people will go away very soon," said S. Thondaiman, Minister for Rural Development and Tourism and President of the Sri Lanka Labor Congress. He was the chief guest of honor at the opening ceremony of the upper eastern level of the shopping complex of the Mayurapathi Sri Badrakali Temple Hindu Cultural Center, held last Friday at Vellavattai. The minister further said in the course of his address on the occasion:

"We think there is so much prejudice, caste differences, and jealousies among the Tamil community. But, in fact, they are more evident among the majority community on the island. There we see so much of caste differences and power struggles on the increase.

At least at this juncture, we should all stand united with a strong determination, and sure success will not be very far from us.

Recently in an area in the Colombo metropolis, there was a potential danger of a big clash between two religious groups in the Sinhalese community, and I who belong to Hindu religion intervened and succeeded in stopping it.

It is not necessary that Hinduism flourish only in Mat-takalappu, Malaiagam, or Jaffna. Hinduism and its Saivatism can thrive wherever there are good men of faith, and this temple is a magnificent testimony to the fact.

It is essential that there be peace, orderliness, and discipline in the temples. I realized this very clearly after my recent visit to India.

In our temples here in Sri Lanka, there is an atmosphere filled with divinity, a certain peace of mind, and happiness; whereas, in India they are absent.

I heartily congratulate Vallipuram, the trustee, and other officials of the temple management for making this temple one of the best in this land, within such a short time.

Currently, the Hindus themselves have embarked upon a movement to change their names and religion. What the exact cause for this sudden move is must be examined, and ways and means of preventing this should be explored. I urge that the temple administration undertake the task.

Even when I held the portfolio of Minister for Sari Industry, I was able to give the land grant to this temple. Because I belong to the Hindu religion, I had to first make the allotment of land to the Muslim and other communities before allotting the land to our temple."

Minister of State for Hindu Cultural Affairs P.P. Deva Raja, Colombo Corporation's alternative Mayor K. Ganeslingam, Dr. Jayalat Jayvardhana, Sri Saravana Gutukkal participated in the ceremony.

Liberation Front Member Tells of Tamils' Plight

93AS0632A Colombo VIRAKESARI in Tamil
9 Feb 93 p 7

[Article by Front M.P.: "Akkaraipatru, Sammandurai, Kalmunai Tamils' Sufferings Are Indescribable"]

[Text] In the Ambarrai district, particularly in the government aided divisions of Akkaraipatru, Sammandurai, and Kalmunai, "the sufferings of the Tamil people are indescribable," says a member of Parliament belonging to the Tamil Liberation Front, Mavai Senaathi Raja, in an interview to Kesari yesterday. "Last week I toured the area and learnt about the sufferings firsthand; the Tamils are political orphans left in the lurch," he said.

Mr. Raja stayed in the district for about a week and extensively toured refugee camps, rehabilitated settlements etc. and spoke to the people and found out their grievances. Mothers who lost their young children,

young girls who lost their husbands and many others with tears in their eyes narrated their pains and sufferings to the member of parliament.

A young girl with full of sorrow said, "I had not even completed one year of wedded life. One night, the security forces surrounded our area. They told us that they would interrogate my husband and then release him later. They took away my husband along with many others. But till today nothing is known as to what happened to him." Hundreds of other girls narrated similar tales of woes.

The parliament member also visited the rehabilitated village. The villager told him that the authorities assured the people that there would be security and tempted them that all amenities would be provided and they should come and settle down here. The people believed them and settled down in the village. But there has been no relief in sight, they complained. There are no adequate opportunities for business, even for day to day survival, food. They have to toil a lot.

"They invited us to appear for job interviews, assuring us that job opportunities would be given to us. We also

had great hopes, but still we have been waiting and waiting in vain," said many youngsters.

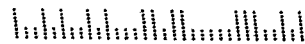
"In our district, the Muslim and Sinhalese families victimized by violent actions are getting all the government relief benefits, where as the Tamils are not given any benefit," said the villagers. Many heads of Tamil families have been included in the list of persons termed as missing only after the security forces surrounded our area. Two years have rolled by and still nobody knows as to what happened to them. Government aid is given only to the people affected by the armed forces or unidentified groups. But to us, the Tamils who were victimized by the security forces, no relief is given. On enquiry, the higher officials explained that the government circular stipulates that relief aid should be given only to those affected by the armed forces divisions or unidentified groups. Therefore, no relief aid is permissible to the people affected by the security forces and the request for relief is denied," said the inmates to the visiting member of parliament. "The whole plight of the Tamils in the district of Ambarrai is such that even a rock like heart will melt away," said the liberation front member.

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